



Tennessee Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Resources Program

**Guidelines for Best Management Practice Installation With Funding Provided by the
Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund (ARCF)
Fiscal Year - 2005**

1. Introduction. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) is authorized by TCA 67-4-409(l) to administer the Agricultural Resources Conservation Fund (ARCF). This statute states that the intent of the General Assembly is for **the highest priority of the ARCF to be the abatement and prevention of nonpoint source water pollution that may be associated with agricultural production**. Historically, funding has been provided to landowners through the Soil Conservation Districts (SCDs) for the installation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). New initiatives by the General Assembly have made it essential that the measure of program effectiveness be in terms of measurable water quality improvements. To this end, we strongly recommend the adoption by ARCF recipients of the following procedures.

Watershed Evaluations. All SCDs should evaluate the streams in their county, and should certainly be aware of the ones that are listed as impaired on the 2002 303(d) List, as published by the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation-Division of Water Pollution Control. Agricultural land uses having an obvious negative impact on water quality should be identified by the SCD. The landowners in these identified areas should be contacted directly by the District, and encouraged to apply for cost share funding for the needed BMPs. Each SCD should consult with the appropriate TDA Regional Administrator prior to application submittal.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: JULY 1, 2004

Watershed Prioritization. Following the development of information regarding all the streams in the county, the SCD Board, the District Conservationist, the TDA Regional Administrator, and any other persons involved locally should collaborate to rank the applications submitted by landowners for BMP cost share. The criteria for ranking needed BMPs should focus on the likelihood of obtaining measurable water quality improvements from the BMP installation. TDA recommends that SCDs develop a plan to systematically address all watersheds in their counties, and set the goal of removing streams or segments of streams from the 303(d) List, and also to remove sources of impairment from streams not currently listed, so as to prevent them from being listed as an impaired water. This can be accomplished by focusing on one small watershed at a time, installing all needed BMPs within that small watershed and moving on to the next small watershed, utilizing a "worst watershed first" approach. The intent of this effort should be to remove nonpoint pollution sources from all waters in each District. In order to achieve the objectives mandated by the General Assembly, TDA is requiring all BMP implementation programs to have a watershed focus. The process is outlined as follows:

1. Select a small watershed,
2. Evaluate the watershed, identifying all BMPs that are needed to stop active erosion or the direct transport of pollutants to the state's waters,
3. Attempt to obtain 100% landowner participation in the watershed, through one-on-one meetings, phone calls, site visits, or educational forums, etc.,
4. Make application for funding to TDA,
5. Install funded BMPs, and

6. Coordinate with TDA for watershed monitoring after the BMP installations are complete.

Projects submitted as a result of this process will receive primary consideration for approval for cost-share funding. TDA recognizes that these recommendations could represent a change in the way funds are administered at the local level. **It is imperative that the funds used through this program demonstrate that voluntary cost share programs can restore impaired waters.**

Additional Funding. If at any time during the watershed evaluation the SCD becomes aware of water quality problems in their county that are not related to agricultural practices, and there is local interest in solving these problems, the SCD is encouraged to contact TDA and make an application for funding through the 319 nonpoint source program.

2. Guidance for BMP Implementation. Certain BMPs will be eligible to receive cost share funds through TDA's ARCF in Fiscal Year 2005. The funds will be administered locally through the Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors in each county and with other partners, with the concurrence of TDA's Regional Administrators. Technical assistance will be provided by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service(NRCS). Specifications for all BMPs will be in accordance with the NRCS Field Technical Guide.

Conservation Plans will be developed by the NRCS District Conservationist and will be strictly adhered to for the purpose of establishing eligibility for cost share payment. Higher rates of inputs may be used, however only those rates specified in the Conservation Plan will be eligible to receive cost share funding. Normal equipment and labor costs supplied by the cooperator (seedbed preparation, tractor usage, etc.) will not be eligible for cost share. Specialized equipment usage will be eligible for cost share, such as no-till drills, spriggers, bulldozers, backhoes, etc. Cost share for other specialized equipment will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The life span of all practices shall conform to NRCS guidelines. The cooperator shall make reimbursement on a pro-rated basis for the destruction of any cost-shared BMP before the end of the expected useful life of the BMP.

The cost share shall not exceed 75% of the cost of establishing agricultural BMPs. The SCD Board of Supervisors may elect to set a lesser percent for cost shares, set a lesser maximum payment or use another payment system such as a flat rate. In all cases however, close attention should be given to the specific BMPs for which cost-share funding is requested. **Practices that will result in a high degree of water quality improvement should not be under-funded to the extent that they are not installed.** In the event of additional cost share funding from another source, the total amount of all cost shares shall not exceed 90% of the total cost of establishing the BMP.

3. BMP Specifics. Consistent with the TDA policy that was implemented in FY 2000, certain BMPs will be eligible for cost share without the need for a preliminary site visit from the Regional Administrator to determine eligibility. The following is a list of these **"No Site Visit Required" BMPs:**

Cropland Conversion.

Grade Stabilization Structures.

Sediment Control Basins. Emphasis should be placed on this practice as a component of a larger field system for erosion control.

Diversions.

Terraces.

**Grassed Waterways.
Buffer/Filter Strips.**

Livestock Exclusion Systems. Components will include fencing, alternative watering sources, stream crossings, limited stream access and streambank stabilization and/or restoration, as needed.

Certain BMPs will be eligible for cost share only after a site visit has been made to determine eligibility. The following is a list of these **"Site Visit Required"** BMPs:

Heavy Use Areas.

Critical Area Treatment.

Winter Cover- 21 West Tennessee Counties. Cost share for winter cover shall not exceed 75% of the establishment cost, with a payment limitation of \$8 per acre. Harvesting or haying will be allowed on winter cover practices, if winter cover is aerially seeded or drilled into existing residue. No grazing will be permitted. Seeding rates and dates will be either specified in the NRCS Conservation Plan or in accordance with the University of Tennessee Publication PB 378.

Winter Cover- 74 Middle and East Tennessee Counties. . Cost share for winter cover shall not exceed 75% of the establishment cost, with a payment limitation of \$8 per acre. Harvesting or haying will be allowed on winter cover practices after the 1st of April. No grazing will be permitted. Seeding rates and dates will be either specified in the NRCS Conservation Plan or in accordance with the University of Tennessee Publication PB 378.

Ponds. Pond construction deemed eligible for funding must be a component of a livestock exclusion system or a rotational grazing system, consistent with the Conservation Plan. Cost share for ponds shall not exceed 75% of the establishment cost, with a payment limitation of \$1500.

Streambank Stabilization/Restoration, other than Livestock Exclusion.
Rotational Grazing Systems.

Seeding Practices.

Seeding practices will be funded for the establishment of a permanent vegetative cover to be used for pasture or hay land. Establishment will be funded on Highly Erodible Land (HEL), and on tracts being converted from rowcrop, regardless of HEL designation. A soil test performed by the University of Tennessee soil laboratory will be required. Cost sharing on lime and fertilizer will be based on soil test results. Eligible seeding rates and dates are those specified on the NRCS Conservation Plan or in accordance with the University of Tennessee Publication PB 378. Local SCD Boards, with the concurrence of the TDA Regional Administrator and the NRCS District Conservationist, have the option to extend seeding dates in the event that weather conditions prevent adherence to specified dates. Companion crop seeds (e.g. wheat) will not be eligible for cost share. Maintenance for a minimum for five years will be required on all permanent vegetative covers. Pasture and hayland renovation will be approved only where a soil loss potential exists (50% or less desirable cover), and as recommended in the cooperator's conservation plan. No funding for renovation will be given to pasture or hayland tracts unless the soil loss exceeds "T".

Poultry Litter and Mortality Management Facilities.

A determination must be made that establishing such structures will result in water quality improvement at the site. Cost share shall not exceed 75% of the establishment cost, with a payment limitation of \$5,000. The only facilities eligible are those that were in operation prior to May 1, 1999.

Animal Waste Systems.

The cost share for animal waste systems shall not exceed 75%, with the maximum payment to be determined by funding availability.

If a BMP is not listed on either of the above lists, then it would be classified as a Miscellaneous BMP, and as such, would be in the "**Site Visit Required**" Category. The need for the practice must be determined by the TDA Regional Administrator in consultation with the NRCS District Conservationist and approved by the SCD Board.

Information and Education (I&E) Projects.

Agricultural projects that are directed toward landowners, producers and managers, such as field days, BMP demonstrations, seminars, informational material, and training/workshop events will be eligible, pending approval and funding availability. Each funded project shall include a means of testing the success of the educational activity, such as an evaluation form, survey, etc. The survey results shall be submitted with the reimbursement request. A standard evaluation form will be furnished at a later date.